

The Contents of a Dyak Medicine Chest.

BY BISHOP HOSE.

A few days ago I was in the upper part of the Saribas river, the home of the race once celebrated throughout Malaya for daring deeds of piracy. My companion was the Rev. William Howell, the joint author with Mr. D. J. S. Bailey of 'A Dictionary of the Sea-Dyak Language,' and an authority on all subjects connected with the religious and other customs of that people. We had ascended the Padih, an affluent of the main river, to the village of Kundong, where we were going to spend the night in the Dyak house, of which Brok is the *tuai*, or head-man. The house is of moderate length, about twenty doors; and as usual the apartments of the *tuai* are near the middle of the building. There we were hospitably installed on the *ruai*, or undivided hall, (sometimes described as a verandah), which extends throughout the whole length of a Sea-Dyak house, and occupies about half of its area. The good mats were brought down from the *sadau*, or loft, and spread for us; the rare luxury of a chair was provided for me and there we talked, and taught, and answered questions, and dispensed medicines, while the inhabitants of the other rooms gathered round us, as well as the occupants of our host's private quarters. There also we ate, and there we slept when the kindly people would at last consent to our going to bed.

The majority of the 'rooms,' i. e. separate tenements, in this house are inhabited by Christians of long standing, but there are a few who have not yet come in. Amongst them is a *Manang*, or Doctor of Magic, named Dasu, who has a large practice in the neighbourhood. I was anxious to interview him in order to get some information that I wanted for the purpose of comparing the original spiritual beliefs of the Borneans with those that underlie the Mohammedanism of the Malays of the Peninsula. I was also desirous of ascertaining how far the methods of the

Dyak *Manang*, when undertaking to cure diseases, resembled those of the *Pawang* and *Bomor*, his Malay confrères.

At our invitation Dr. Dasu came out of his room readily enough, and sat down with us to chat and smoke a cigarette. He talked freely and intelligently about such matters of general interest as happened to be broached, especially the late expedition against the turbulent people of the Ulu Ai, and the terrible epidemic of cholera which was just passing away. But as soon as we began to give the conversation a professional turn, and speak of the practice of medicine by the native doctors of the Saribas, he put on a look of impenetrable reserve, and could hardly be persuaded to speak at all. There is reason to believe that this was chiefly owing to the presence of Howell. He has succeeded in winning the confidence and affectionate regard of Dyaks to an unusual degree, but he is unpopular among the *Manangs*. His teaching has led people to think for themselves, and wherever he goes the business and the gains of the village doctor shew a tendency to decrease. Moreover several of the fraternity have submitted to his influence, abandoned their tricks, and taken to honest farming. It is known too that some of these have surrendered their whole stock of charms to my friend, and have also made dangerous revelations, whereby the profession has been much discredited.

So Dr. Dasu was only with great difficulty induced to impart to us his knowledge. He told me after more confidential relations had grown up between us, that he suspected me of an intention, by some means or other, to get possession of his precious *materia medica*, and so deprive him of his means of living. However his fears were removed by repeated assurances that it was information only that I wanted, and that I was consulting him just because I preferred to get it direct from a professor of repute, rather than trust to reports received from white men. At length we persuaded him to be gently catechised. I got some precise answers to my questions respecting certain articles of Dyak belief which had been variously defined by different investigators, and about which my ideas had been a good deal confused. But those matters are not the subject of this note. It is the concluding incident of the rather prolonged interview that I propose to describe.

We had talked to one another so pleasantly and frankly that I thought I might ask Dasu as a great favor to show me his *Lupong*, or Medicine Chest, and the charms of power which it contained. It was quite evident that this aroused his suspicions again, and he retired within himself as before. But the principal people of the house, who were sitting by us, urged him to consent, and, as old acquaintances of mine, assured him of my good faith. So he was at last persuaded, and went to his own room to fetch the treasure.

As I have said, the good mats of the household, as is usual when it is intended to show respect to a visitor, had been taken down for our accommodation from the place where they are stored. But we now saw that the most valued of them all had been held in reserve. This, which was made of fine and very flexible rotan, the latest triumph of the skill and industry of our courteous hostess Ipah, Brok's wife, was now handed down and spread in front of us for the reception of the great man and the mysterious implements of his profession. After some considerable delay, probably intended to excite our curiosity the more, he appeared and sat down on the mat prepared for him: a subdued murmur of applause and satisfaction greeting him as he took his seat.

A Manang's *Lupong*, or case for holding his charms, may be almost anything. Sometimes it is a box, sometimes a basket, sometimes a bag. In this instance it was an open-mouthed basket made of thin shavings of bamboo, hung round the neck of the owner by a strip of bark.

Before beginning the exhibition Dasu made a little formal speech, in which with much show of humility, he spoke in depreciation of his own powers and knowledge, and of his collection of remedial charms, as compared with those of other members of the profession elsewhere. These remarks were of course received with complimentary expressions of dissent from the audience: and then at last the contents of the basket were displayed before us. They were tied up together in a cloth bag, the most highly prized being further enclosed in special receptacles of their own, such as a second cloth covering, a little bamboo box with a lid, or a match-box. They were ceremoniously brought out and placed side by side on the mat

of honour. I was then invited to handle and examine them, and the name and use of each were told me without any fresh indication of unwillingness. This is a list of them.

i. *Batu bintang*, or Star-stone; a small transparent stone rounded by the action of water till it was almost spherical, with a rather rough surface. The *Manang* looked upon it as his badge of authority, and told the following story of the way he became possessed of it. Many years ago, in the interval between harvest and the next seed-time, he was working as a cooly in Upper Sarawak. There he had a dream in which he was visited by the being whom he looks upon as his guardian-spirit. As in all cases when this spirit has had any communication to make to him, it appeared in the form of a tortoise. It told him that he must forthwith put himself under instruction in order to be qualified for the office of a *Manang*: and that if he neglected this command all the spirits would be angry, and death or madness would be the penalty. When he awoke he found the *Batu bintang* by his side, and had no doubt it was the gift of the spirit. Accordingly he did as he was bidden without loss of time. He acquired the professional knowledge and the stock in trade which were necessary, and was at last duly initiated with all the proper rites and ceremonies.

ii. *Batu krat ikan sembilan*, or The petrified section of the Sembilan fish. This was a curious object which I could not quite make out. It was oblong in shape, about two inches long, one inch broad, and half an inch thick in the middle, but getting suddenly thinner towards the two edges till it became not more than $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch. The thick part was hollow, having a large oval-shaped perforation going through it. It resembled a section from the middle of a large winged seed, but heavy for its size, and feeling like stone. I could not of course test this by cutting or scraping. When used it is soaked for a time in water; the water is then given to the sick man to drink, or is rubbed gently upon the part of his body which is affected.

iii. *Batu lintar*, or Thunder-bolt: a small dark-coloured stone, about an inch and a half long, and a quarter of an inch thick at the base, tapering to a sixteenth of an inch at the point; curved and rather like a very small rhinoceros horn, and highly polished. It was probably the same kind of stone as that of

which the stone implements found in the Malay Peninsula are made, which are also called *Batu lintar*. It is pressed firmly against the body wherever pain is felt.

iv. *Batu nitur*, another name for Thunder-bolt: a minute four-side crystal, half an inch long and about two lines thick. A charm to be used only in extreme cases. It is dipped in water and then shaken over the patient. If he starts when the drops of water fall upon his body he will recover, otherwise he will die.

v. *Batu krang jiranau*, or Petrified root-stock of *jiranau* (a Zingiberad?). They told us this is the Dyak name of a kind of wild ginger. The word is curiously near to *Jerangau* or *Jeringu*, which Ridley says is *Acorus calamus*: "a plant much used by native medicine-men," (Wilkinson, Malay-English Dictionary.) The thing so called was possibly part of the back-bone of some animal, bent double and the two ends tied together, each vertebra brown and shining after long use. A charm for dysentery and indigestion, and also for consumption. It is dipped in oil, and rubbed on the patient's body in a downward direction.

vi. *Batu ilau*, or Sparkling stone, also called *Batu kras*, or the hard stone. A six-sided crystal, two inches long and three quarters of an inch thick. One end appeared to have been formerly stuck into some sort of handle, as it was covered with *malau*, or lac. This is the indispensable sight-stone to be looked into for a view of that which is future, or distant, or otherwise invisible to ordinary eyes. It is specially used by *Manangs*, for discovering where the soul of the sick man, wandering away from the body, is concealing itself; or for detecting the particular demon who is causing the illness.

There were also, jumbled up together at the bottom of the bag, a number of tusks of wild boar, pebbles, and other rubbish, but these were pronounced to be *utai ngapa*, things of no importance. One article that we hoped to find was absent. Dasu said he should be glad indeed to have it, but it had never come in his way. It is the *Batu burung endan*, or Pelican stone. He explained to us that this is a stone which has the magical power of securing the presence and cooperation of a spirit who dwells in the form of the *endan*, (*pelicanus malaccensis*). When the *Manang* is seeking to enter *Selayan*, the Spirit world, in search

of the errant soul of a sick man, this demon can ensure to him a swift and unimpeded passage thither and back again.

While Dasu was telling us the story of his vision of the Tortoise spirit who gave him the *Batu Bintang* I watched his face carefully for any sign that he believed, or did not believe his account. I could not be sure : but I am inclined to think he did not. He seemed relieved when we had finished our examination of his possessions, and he could pack them all up and carry them off to the security of his own dwelling.

Several similar collections of charms have at different times been given to me, obtained from Manangs who have become Christians but it was particularly interesting to me to have a set actually in use exhibited and explained by their owner, and I have thought that a description of them might possibly have some interest for other Members of the Society.